

The Facts on Ephedra

Turn your body into a fat-burning machine! Lose weight without exercise! Do these claims sound too good to be true? Well, they are. These claims are not based in scientific truth. Many of these supplements contain the dangerous herb ephedra, also known as ma huang. These supplements include Metabolife, Xenadrine, Diet Fuel, Ripped Fuel, and Enhancer X.

Ephedra is an herb that excites the central nervous system and cardiovascular system. It basically acts like cocaine in your body, exciting the heart, constricting blood vessels and increasing heart rate and blood pressure. Constricted blood vessels mean your body is not getting necessary oxygen during exercise. Ephedra makes you feel like you have more energy but it also dehydrates you and over-works your kidneys. Other bad side effects include the inability to urinate, abnormal heart rhythms, cardiac arrest, dizziness, seizures, insomnia, nausea and vomiting, and death. Two FT Jackson soldiers recently died after taking ephedra.

Ephedra is not regulated. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate ephedra because it is not a prescription drug. No one approves the safety and claims on these supplements. No one regulates how much ephedra is actually in the pills or powders, meaning the amount can vary from jar to jar. One pill could have no ephedra and the next pill could have five times the amount on the label.

To date, the FDA has received over 800 reports of adverse reactions and more than 35 reports of death due to ephedra containing supplements. Many states ban the sale of ephedra to anyone under 18 years of age. The state of Florida and the NCAA banned its use.

Many supplements contain caffeine with ephedra. Caffeine increases the effects of ephedra, making your heartbeat faster than either caffeine or ephedra alone. Look for guarana, guara concentrate extract, kola, and kola nut on labels. These forms of caffeine contain 3 to 5 times more caffeine than coffee! Foods containing caffeine and theophylline such as coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate also increase the effects of ephedra.

Supplement bottles contain the following warning: Do not take ephedra if you are pregnant, breastfeeding or under the age of 18. You should also not take ephedra if you have been diagnosed with heart conditions, high blood pressure, glaucoma, thyroid disease, diabetes, psychiatric disorders, neurological disorders, renal disease, have difficulty urinating or have prostate enlargement. Also, do not take ephedra if you take MAO inhibitors, methyl dopa, any product containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine (such as Sudafed) or medication for high blood pressure.

We recommend that you don't take ephedra at all. The bottom line: Ephedra is a very dangerous herb that can kill.

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